



2024 Alexandria City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Please share any responses by Friday, May 31st to
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CANDIDATE NAME: Kirk McPike

1. In 2019, in response to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Climate, our city made a *Declaration of Climate Emergency*, and created its *2040 Environmental Action Plan* and *Green Building Policy* (GBP). A key goal of that EAP was to achieve a 50% reduction from 2005 levels of greenhouse gas pollution emitted by Alexandria by 2030. In the last election campaign, most if not all candidates identified climate change as among their top five priorities.
 - a. **Do you agree that Alexandria is in a climate emergency, and if so, where do you rank the climate emergency among your priorities?**
Yes, Alexandria, and the entire world, is in a climate emergency. Addressing this is one of my top priorities, and one of the two or three issues that I speak about most often during this campaign.
 - b. **Are you committed to achieving the goal of 50% GHG reduction in our community-wide emissions by 2030, or do you see this as aspirational?**
Yes, I am committed to achieving our goal of 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. We made this commitment as a City in 2019 through the Environmental Action Plan, and I believe that the climate crisis is too serious to allow our resolve to slip.
2. To its credit, the present Mayor and Council have established and begun funding a City Office of Climate Action.
 - a. **How will you evaluate our progress on achieving the greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets included in the City's Environmental Action Plan?**
I believe that we should adopt the proposed methods for evaluating progress, and revising our strategies to address identified shortcomings, laid out in the City's Energy and Climate Change Action Plan which was published last year. We must collect relevant data, working with our partners in the federal government and COG, and carefully assess our progress towards meeting our goals. We should also partner with neighboring jurisdictions, so that we can compare both our policies and their impacts on carbon emissions. We should be proactive about adopting policies from other jurisdictions that are proving beneficial, and fight for increased local authority in cases where that is needed.
 - b. **How will you hold the City Manager accountable for achieving the reductions necessary to meet these targets?**
Just as we set other goals for the City Manager to achieve in his regular performance reviews, and factor the progress on such goals into his review, we should establish metrics for integrating progress towards climate goals into that analysis. In this review, we should provide guidance on how Council believes we should improve our progress towards our greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals, and clear expectations for their implementation.

3. The Office of Climate Action is developing an update of our Green Building Policy to limit the increase in emissions from new buildings. Similarly, our neighbors in Arlington, Montgomery County, and the District of Columbia, among others in the region, have been strengthening their green building policies. Developers have raised concerns about this and are asking candidates to oppose or dilute this policy.

a. How do you respond to the developers' threats that they will go to other jurisdictions if we upgrade energy efficiency requirements in new buildings approved under the DSUP process?

I am skeptical that improved green building policies, which would increase the overall value of the building and protect it from extreme weather damage over the life of the structure, would significantly reduce the rate of new construction in the City. This is particularly true if we are moving in tandem with our neighboring jurisdictions on this matter. I will always welcome input from those who live in the City and those who do work, including redevelopment work, in the City, but my assessment of their input would include their vested interests and my above-stated skepticism. We have not seen a significant slowdown in construction since the adoption of our existing Green Building Policies, and I do not expect that a carefully-structured improvement of those policies would foster such a challenge.

b. Will you support a Green Building Policy that requires levels of energy efficiency in new buildings, such as reaching net-zero energy use, that are in line with our 2030 and 2050 emissions reduction goals?

Yes. I believe that energy efficiency is a key metric that we should be building our Green Building Policy around. Further, I believe that we should create a policy that allows staff to raise standards within an established range if we find that the newly-adopted policy is not achieving our desired results.

c. How should Alexandria estimate and plan for the multi-generational social costs to our community if developers continue to put up buildings that waste energy and burn methane?

All projects should be assessed on their projected greenhouse gas emissions, energy efficiency, and other features that could impact our local climate in the years to come. These assessments should then be collected and used as we plan future efforts to address climate impacts such as heat islands and flooding. We should work with our delegation to the General Assembly to secure more authority to price in these externalities into the contributions we expect from developers working in the City.

4. Buildings are responsible for about 60% of our community's greenhouse gas pollution, and existing buildings are responsible for about 95% of those emissions. Sharply reducing energy use in existing buildings is critical for reaching our 2030 climate goals, will save residents and businesses money over the long-term, and make buildings more comfortable and healthy. As Virginia is a Dillon Rule state and cannot mandate energy reductions of private property, the City is currently limited to incentives such as financial subsidies, tax relief, public recognition, technical assistance, revamping the City's PACE program, and taking advantage of existing federal, state and utility weatherization programs. The City can also expand the reach of Alexandria's Green Building Policy to include all renovated buildings that are subject to City land use approval.

- a. **What level of priority should be given to reducing building energy use and methane emissions in existing buildings, and how would you propose financing and supporting such efforts?**

This should be one of our highest priorities. Already, our Green Building Policy means that new or redeveloped large structures in the City produce fewer emissions than did the buildings they replaced, but our City is full of buildings that are unlikely to be replaced before 2050, to say nothing of 2030. In fact, the majority of buildings that will be in Alexandria in 2050 already exist today, so we have to improve the emissions from existing buildings if we want to have any chance of hitting our goals. We need to create programs to encourage homeowners and other building owners to transition their properties away from fossil fuels and to improve their energy usage intensity by better weatherization and other improvements. For many of our less-wealthy residents, we are going to have to connect them to financing to cover the costs of these transitions. The City cannot raise sufficient funds on its own to achieve massive overhaul of our existing structures. We are going to need to work aggressively, often in partnership with private building owners, to pull down grant dollars from private actors, the Commonwealth, and the federal government. We must work with our delegations to Congress and Richmond to ensure they are advocating for more funds to help localities address these needs. I would also be open to finding ways to establish a public/private partnership that could help connect residents and businesses with funding for these improvements. And the City should show leadership by making these modifications to our own buildings quickly and publicly.

- b. **Which of the abovementioned ideas would you support, and what other ideas can you offer for reducing the energy use of our existing buildings by 50% by 2030?**

A challenge such as this requires an all-of-the-above approach. Further, we should work with COG as well as the National League of Cities to stay up to date on new strategies being deployed successfully elsewhere, and be prepared to advocate in Richmond for increased local authority to adopt such policies ourselves, when needed.

5. Climate change is steadily increasing flooding and extreme precipitation risks. Alexandria has already made substantial investments in flood control, both in our stormwater infrastructure and along the Old Town waterfront. At the same time, some Alexandria neighborhoods are considerably hotter than others, due to historic redlining, the urban heat island effect, and a lack of tree coverage and green space.

- a. **How should projected changes in flooding and extreme weather events over the coming years be accounted for in our City's infrastructure investments?**

As part of our continuing Flood Action program, we should be reassessing the future needs for flooding abatement and improved infrastructure on a regular basis, and revising our plans to address them. I would also support finding ways to tie funding for these construction projects to the energy intensity of buildings, or perhaps their carbon emissions, if we could receive such authority from Richmond. We already provide adjustments to the storm water fee to residents who take actions to reduce runoff from their properties. A similar program that helps fund increased stormwater management infrastructure by shifting those costs towards energy inefficient buildings, or alternatively by reducing fees to energy efficient buildings, could have the beneficial effect of also encouraging the sort of built infrastructure redevelopment addressed in the previous question.

- b. Will you support providing funding to increase planting and maintenance of trees with a priority in our hottest neighborhoods, adequately connecting residents to cooling centers if they cannot afford air conditioning, and other needed actions?**
Yes, and I have spoken publicly about this challenge on many instances. I also believe that we must require redevelopment work occurring in our hottest neighborhoods to include cooling features such as trees, shade, splash pads and publicly accessible cooling centers, to the maximum extent allowed by our authority from Richmond.

- 6. Use of public transportation, bicycling and walking should become default modes of transportation in order to increase the safety and livability of our communities, provide mobility for those who cannot drive, and reduce energy use and air pollution.
 - a. Do you support continuing free DASH service, and investments in bus rapid transit (BRT) routes and bus stop infrastructure?**
Yes, I will always support free DASH service. I have voted to retain free DASH service, to expand the DASH network, in favor of BRT and improved bus stop infrastructure, and to reverse proposed cuts to service lines during my time on Council, and I will continue to do so.

 - b. Do support establishing protected bike lanes along key routes to connect all Alexandrians?**
Yes. As someone who cares about climate change a great deal, and who also uses a bike to traverse the City on a regular basis, I strongly support establishing protected bike lanes and fully building out our bike lane network.